

**National
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National
Year of
Reading
2026

Creative activities

**Poetry, writing and
storytelling activity ideas for
community group leaders**

Welcome

This pack has been created for you, whether you work with young children, teenagers or adults – perhaps in a faith, youth or hobby setting. The activities here are designed to be easy to pick up and delivered with minimal preparation – and you don't need to be an 'expert' in creative writing!

What is this pack for?

The activities in this pack aim to encourage creativity, confidence and a love of reading and writing in a light-touch, enjoyable way. They can be woven into your existing sessions so you do not need to run a dedicated 'creative writing class'. Think of them as a fun, low-pressure addition to your regular activities.

How to use this pack

Each activity includes:

- A suggested time – so you can plan it into your session
- A 'why run this?' note – to help you introduce it confidently to your group
- Step-by-step facilitation guidance – written for you as the leader
- A suitability badge – indicating whether the activity works best for younger participants, older or more confident participants, or all ages
- Where relevant, a note to photocopy pages

Tips for facilitating creative activities

- **There are no wrong answers** – remind your group that creative writing and expression is personal and there is no single ‘correct’ way to do it.
- **Model it yourself** – if you feel comfortable, have a go at the activity alongside your group. This helps reduce any nervousness.
- **Keep it flexible** – some participants may prefer to listen or observe until they feel more comfortable.
- **Sharing is not compulsory** – invite sharing gently so that nobody feels under pressure to show their work if they don’t want to.
- **Go at your group’s pace** – the suggested times are a guide, not a rule. If people are engaged, let them keep going! Or if you feel the group needs a break before coming back to the activity, that’s fine too.

Badge guide

★ All ages	Suitable for all participants. Works well as an icebreaker or inclusive group activity.
★ Younger / beginner	Best for younger participants or those newer to creative writing. Lower barrier to entry — hands-on and playful.
★ Older / confident	Best for older participants or those more confident with writing. Encourages deeper reflection and richer language.

1. Dear me

🕒 20–30 minutes ★ Older / confident

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Why run this?

Writing a letter to your past or future self is a powerful way to build self-awareness, practise reflection and enjoy some quiet creative time. It works especially well with young people and adults who may enjoy a moment of thoughtful introspection within a busy group session.

How to introduce it to your group:

"We're going to spend a few quiet minutes writing a letter – but not to anyone else. We're writing to ourselves. It might feel a bit unusual at first, but it's a great way to reflect and tune in with ourselves. There are no rules and it's just for you."

How to run it:

- Share the reflection prompts below with the group – either read them aloud or write them on a board.
- Give participants 15–20 minutes of quiet writing time.
- Remind participants their writing is private – they do not need to show anyone, but could share a line or thought at the end of the activity if they are comfortable doing so.

Activity

Writing a letter, a poem or a flow of thoughts to your younger and/or future self can be a great way to reflect and enjoy a moment of introspection.

Reflection prompts

- What would you say to yourself five or 10 years ago?
- Have you changed? What lessons have you learned?

Sentence starters to help you begin

- Do you remember when...
- I've often thought about this moment/memory...
- If we were to meet...

Creative twist

Imagine if the younger or older version of you could meet your present self. What would they say to each other? Where would this meeting happen? What emotion would be present?

2. This place

🕒 15–25 minutes ★ All ages

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Why run this?

This activity helps participants connect with their local community and environment through writing. It is inclusive and accessible for a wide range of ages and writing abilities because participants can write as little or as much as they like.

How to introduce it to your group:

“Think of a place that means something to you – it doesn’t have to be anywhere grand. It could be the park you walk through, the corner shop, a grandparent’s kitchen, or a street you know well. We’re going to write a little about what that place means to us.”

How to run it:

- Ask participants to close their eyes briefly and picture a place – give them 30 seconds.
- Share the prompts below and allow 10–15 minutes of writing time.
- If the group is comfortable, invite participants to share their place and one thing they wrote.

Activity

Pick a place that means something to you – for example the park you play football in, or the corner shop where you get your groceries. Reflect or write about this place using the questions and sentence starters below.

Prompts to get you started

- What feelings come up when you think about this place?
- The first time I visited...
- If this place was a person, what would it be like?
- Is there a memory you have of this place?

3. Soundtrack your story

🕒 25–40 minutes

★ All ages

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Why run this?

Music and sound are great ways to bring stories to life and create group engagement.

How to run it:

- Choose one of the icebreaker activities to set the tone and get participants thinking about the relationship between storytelling and music.

How to introduce it to your group:

“Music has a way of taking us straight back to a moment or a feeling. After a quick activity to introduce sound and storytelling, we’re going to explore some of the songs that mean something to us. There are no right or wrong answers and it’s completely personal.”

Icebreaker activities for storytelling and music

1. Musical freeze story

★ Younger / beginner

Play or make music while telling a story of your choice.

- Encourage the group to move around and act out what they hear (they could be running, sneaking around or swimming for example).
- When the music stops, they freeze like a statue.
- Ask one or two members of the group to share what their character is doing.

2. Song sync

★ Older / confident

Select a word (e.g., “love” or “hey”) and ask members of the group to list as many songs as they can where the word features somewhere in the lyrics.

- Split the group into teams and ask them to write down the examples. Give them a time limit if you’d like to bring an element of pace and competitiveness!
- After the time is up, encourage the group to sing a line of the song featuring the word, one group at a time. Groups are not allowed to repeat the same song.
- Take it in turns around the room. If a group cannot think of another song, they are out of the game!

Activity

Using one of the following prompts, write about a song that stands out to you.

- A song that reminds you of home
- A song that makes you feel joyful or inspired
- A song that reminds you of friends or family
- A cheesy song you can't resist
- A powerful song that reflects a moment in time
- A song your parent, grandparent or older sibling played
- A song you loved when you were younger
- The first concert or gig you ever went to – or the best one
- If you were stranded on a desert island with no hope of rescue, which one song would you want to listen to?

4. Book spine poems

🕒 20–30 minutes ★ All ages

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Why run this?

Book spine poetry is a fantastic low-pressure introduction to poetry for people who think they ‘can’t write’. Because the words are already there on the book covers, participants can focus on creativity and arrangement rather than worrying about vocabulary or spelling. It also encourages handling and exploring books, which is a gentle way to build a positive relationship with reading.

What you’ll need:

- A collection of books with varied and interesting titles — bring a bag of mixed fiction, nonfiction, poetry and children’s books
- A phone or camera to photograph the finished stacks

How to introduce it to your group:

“We’re going to make poems — but we’re not going to write a single word ourselves. Instead, we’ll use the titles on the spines of books and stack them up so the titles read like a poem from top to bottom. Give it a try and you might surprise yourself!”

How to run it:

- Spread the books out so everyone can see the spines.
- Allow 10–15 minutes for individuals or pairs to build their stack.
- Invite everyone to read their ‘poem’ aloud and take a photo to share.

How to make a book spine poem

1. Gather a variety of books, for example fiction, nonfiction or children’s books, poetry. Any mix works.
2. Scan the titles. Look at the spines and notice which titles spark ideas, emotions or themes.
3. Choose a theme or mood such as adventure, love or mystery — or simply let the titles guide you.
4. Stack the books so the titles read in a meaningful order from top to bottom. Adjust until the poem flows.
5. Experiment by swapping books in and out. Sometimes an unexpected pairing creates the best poetry.
6. Read the stack aloud. Does it have rhythm, emotion or a message you like? Tweak as needed.
7. Capture it! Take a photo of your book stack and share your display.



5. Blackout poetry

🕒 20–30 minutes

★ Older / confident

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Why run this?

Blackout poetry is another form of ‘found poetry’ that works particularly well with older participants or those who enjoy a more thoughtful, focused activity. It builds close reading skills, encourages attention to individual words, and produces striking, personal results. The physical act of blacking out text can feel meditative and satisfying.

How to introduce it to your group:

“We’re going to create a poem from a page of text that already exists — by crossing out most of it and leaving just the words that speak to us. The result is your own unique poem, hidden inside someone else’s writing.”

What you’ll need:

- Photocopies of a page of text — a short story extract, a news article, a recipe, song lyrics or a page from a magazine all work well
- Dark markers or pens for blacking out text
- Do not use library books or books that belong to others – always use photocopies

How to run it:

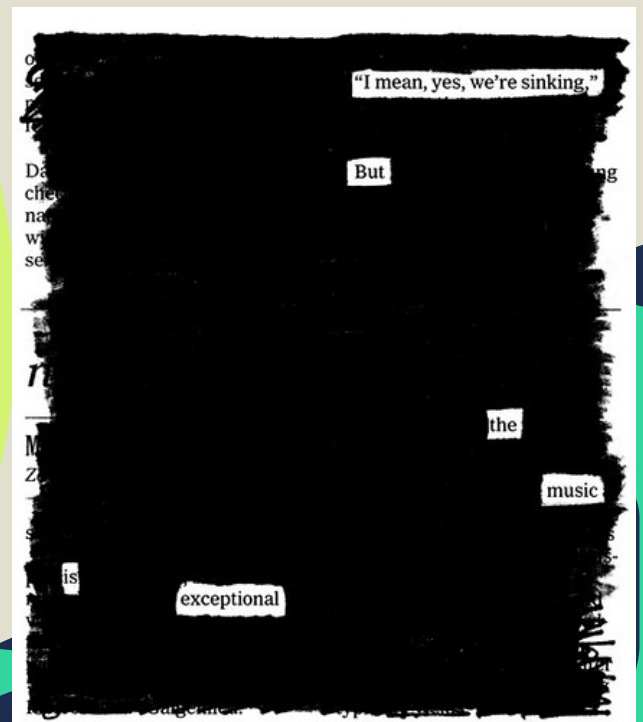
- Hand out photocopied pages and dark markers.
- Walk through the steps on the participant sheet with the group.
- Allow 15–20 minutes for participants to complete their blackout poem.
- Use the reflection questions at the end to facilitate a short group discussion.
- If multiple participants used the same source text, compare the very different poems that emerged — this is a great conversation starter.

Participant steps

1. Choose your text — a short story, leaflet, recipe or article.
2. Read the page through once, without worrying about understanding every word.
3. Circle words that stand out to you. Try to circle around one word per line. Which words feel important, interesting or surprising?
4. Read your circled words aloud in the order they appear. Does it sound like a poem? Adjust — add or remove words as needed.
5. Black out all the words you did not choose using a dark marker.

Reflection questions

- What is your poem about?
- What feeling does it show?
- Why did you pick those words?
- Are you surprised by what was left after you blacked out the rest?
- If your group used the same text to start, how different were your poems?



6. Sticky stories – cut-up collage poetry

🕒 25–40 minutes
★ Younger/ beginner

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Why run this?

Cut-up collage poetry is tactile, playful and very low-pressure — making it ideal for younger participants or anyone who is less confident with writing. Because participants cut and arrange existing text rather than generating words from scratch, it removes the ‘blank page’ fear entirely. It also produces colourful, visually interesting results that participants are proud to take home.

How to run it:

- Lay out materials in the middle of the table so everyone can reach them.
- Give participants 20–30 minutes to cut, arrange and glue.
- Encourage experimenting with different font sizes — large headline text alongside small body text creates great visual contrast.
- Remind participants there is no ‘right way’ — the messier and more personal, the better.
- Display or photograph the finished collages to share with the wider group.

How to introduce it to your group:

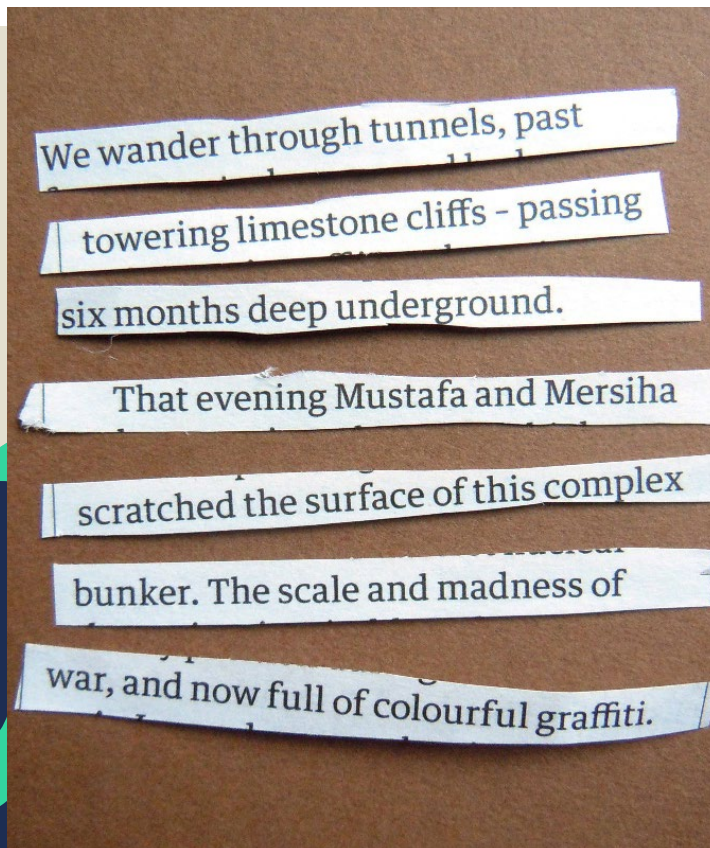
“Today we’re going to make poems by cutting up magazines and newspapers and rearranging what we find. There are no rules. Just cut out words and phrases that interest you and see what you can make with them.”

What you’ll need:

- A selection of old magazines, brochures or newspapers
- Scissors, glue sticks and blank paper
- Optional: pens, pencils, stickers for decoration

Steps for participants

1. Gather your materials — magazines, scissors, glue and a blank sheet of paper.
2. Browse the magazines and cut out words or phrases that feel interesting, unusual or evocative.
3. Arrange and rearrange your words on your blank sheet. Try out different placements to create rhythm and meaning.
4. Glue your words into place once you're happy with the arrangement.
5. Decorate! Use drawings, photos from magazines, doodles or anything else that adds to your piece.



7. Story chain

🕒 20–30 minutes ★ All ages

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Why run this?

Story chains are a simple, joyful and highly inclusive group activity that require no writing materials at all — participants can contribute verbally if they prefer. They are especially good for mixed-ability groups, multilingual groups and anyone who might feel nervous about putting pen to paper. The activity builds group cohesion and produces a genuinely unique story every time.

How to run it:

- Choose one of the opening prompts below or make up your own.
- Go around the group, with each person adding a sentence (or just one word, for a harder version!).
- Encourage ‘yes, and’ thinking — build on whatever came before, even if it is surreal.
- End the story when it feels right — a neat ending, a sudden stop, or a cliffhanger all work.
- If possible, have someone write it down or record it — there will never be another story quite like it.
- This activity works in person and online, across all ages, and can involve multiple languages with interpreter support.

How to introduce it to your group:

“We’re going to create a story together, one sentence at a time. Each person adds the next line and we build it as we go. You can take it anywhere. The stranger the better, in our experience!”

Opening prompts to get you started

“Many years ago, in a time of...”

“At night, the library was not quiet anymore...”

“There was a knock at the door...”

Or set your own theme — adventure, mystery, community, animals — and let the group decide the opening line.

8. Story map for your local area

🕒 30–45 minutes

★ Younger / beginner

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Why run this?

Story mapping bridges creativity with the real world – helping participants see their local area as a space full of storytelling potential. It is particularly good for younger participants or groups with strong community ties, and works well as part of a local heritage or community exploration session. Drawing and planning the route can replace writing for participants who find extended writing difficult.

What you'll need:

- Blank paper or a simple printed map of the local area
- Pencils, pens or felt tips for drawing

How to introduce it to your group:

"Today we're going to invent a story – but it's going to be set right here in our neighbourhood. We'll pick some real local places and imagine an adventure that takes our characters through them."

How to run it:

- Work through the planning questions below as a group before participants draw or write their maps.
- Allow 20–30 minutes for drawing and storytelling.
- Participants can write their story, narrate it aloud or just explain it to a friend.
- Display the finished maps if possible – they make a great community display.

Planning your story

Step 1 — Choose your characters

Pick 2–3 main characters. They could be friends, family, or invented.

Step 2 — Decide the quest

What problem causes the adventure to begin? Ideas: a lost item, an escaped pet, a treasure hunt. Then ask:

- Where do the characters go?
- Who do they meet along the way?
- What do they do to solve the problem?
- How do the characters feel at the end?

Step 3 — Plan the route

Choose 5–10 real places in your local area to include in the story — a park, swimming pool, place of worship, supermarket or library all work well. Think about how your characters travel between them — on foot, by bicycle, or perhaps by hot air balloon!

Step 4 — Draw your map

Sketch a simple map showing the key story locations. Add arrows to show the order in which your characters visit each place..

Step 5 — Bring the story together

Write it down, record yourself narrating it, or just tell it to a friend or family member.

9. Zine making

🕒 45–60 minutes ★ All ages

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Why run this?

Zine making is one of the most satisfying activities in this pack because participants leave with a physical thing they made themselves. A zine (pronounced 'zeen', short for magazine) is a small, self-published booklet. Zines celebrate personal creativity and have a long history of being made by ordinary people to share their ideas, stories and passions. This activity works well as a longer session or across multiple shorter sessions.

What you'll need:

- Paper (any size), scissors, pens, pencils, glue
- Magazines or newspapers for collage elements (optional)
- Access to a photocopier if you want participants to take copies home

How to introduce it to your group:

"We're going to make our very own mini magazines called zines. They can be about anything you like: your interests, your community, a story, a poem, a top 10 list, or just drawings. There's no right way to make a zine."

How to run it:

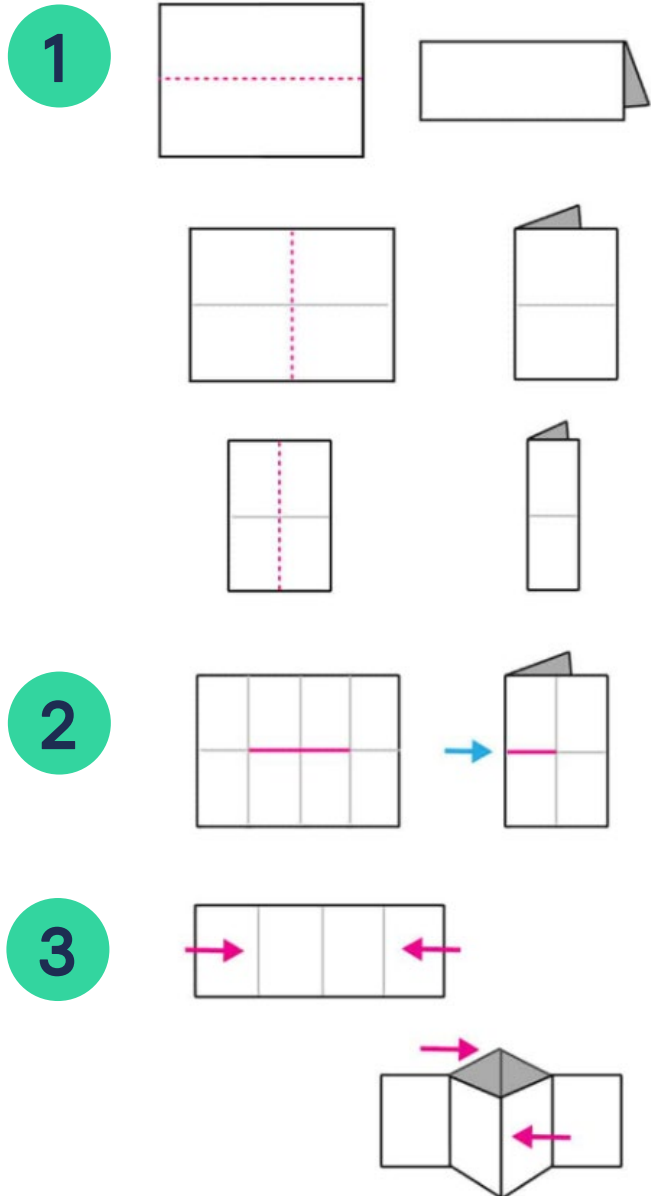
- Demonstrate the folding technique below with a single sheet before participants start.
- Give participants 30–40 minutes to create their zines.
- Encourage doodling, stamping, tearing, sticking and remixing — messy is good!
- If you have a photocopier available, copy the finished zines so participants can take them home, and keep one for a community display.

How to fold your zine

1. Take one sheet of paper and fold it in half.
2. Fold it in half again to make quarters.
3. Fold it one more time — so you have eight small sections.
4. Unfold to quarters, then cut ONE slit along the centre fold.
5. Refold the paper and push the ends together to form a mini booklet.

Fill your pages

- Add drawings, short texts, collages, jokes, top tips or tiny stories.
- Each page only needs a few words or images.
- Think about a theme — or just follow your passions!
- There is no 'right way' — celebrate personal creativity.



10. Freewriting

🕒 15–20 minutes ★ Older / confident

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Why run this?

Freewriting is one of the most effective techniques used by professional writers to overcome the fear of the blank page. The rule is simple: keep writing and don't stop until the timer rings. It works well with older or more confident participants as it requires sustained focus. It can also be used as a warm-up before a longer writing session.

How to run it:

- Choose a prompt from the list below, or let participants choose their own.
- Set a visible timer for 5–10 minutes. Ask for silence while everyone writes.
- When the timer rings, invite participants to read back over what they wrote and underline their favourite line or phrase.
- Optionally, invite people to share their favourite line with the group.

How to introduce it to your group:

"Freewriting is the art of not stopping. Once I set the timer, you write without lifting your pen. Don't worry about grammar, spelling or whether it makes sense — just write. If you get stuck, write 'I don't know what to write' until something else comes. It will."

Prompts to choose from

Photocopy this section for participants if you wish.

- Write about someone who inspires you.
- Describe a perfect day in the future – 10 years from now.
- Turn the last song you listened to into a story.
- Begin with: 'I have never told anyone this, but...'
- Begin with: 'The strangest thing I ever saw was...'

Remember the freewriting rules

- Don't stop writing until the timer rings.
- Don't cross anything out.
- Don't worry about spelling, grammar or whether it is 'good'.
- After writing, pull out your best lines and be ruthless with the rest.

Quick reference – activity overview

Activity	Time	Materials	Best for
1. Dear me	20–30 min	Paper, pens	Older / confident
2. This place	15–25 min	Paper, pens	All ages
3. Writing through music	25–40 min	Paper, pens	All ages
4. Book spine poems	20–30 min	Books, camera	All ages
5. Blackout poetry	20–30 min	Photocopies, markers	Older / confident
6. Sticky stories	25–40 min	Magazines, scissors, glue	Younger / beginner
7. Story chain	20–30 min	None needed	All ages
8. Story map	30–45 min	Paper, pens	Younger / beginner
9. Zine making	45–60 min	Paper, scissors, glue	All ages
10. Freewriting	15–20 min	Paper, pens	Older / confident

Notes

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